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For the Senate Committee on Government Operations:

We greatly appreciate the committee's practice of periodically scrutinizing the state's Open Meeting Law, to make improvements that we all hope will protect the public's right to know what their elected officials are doing on their behalf. But the Vermont Press Association has some serious misgivings about some of the proposed changes reflected in S.114.

Here, in no particular order, are some of our concerns:

\* Allowing for the posting to a municipal Website of minutes within 10 days of the meeting, instead of the current five. Since the law allows for these minutes to be posted in draft form, we do not believe it is necessary to substantially increase the posting period. Under the current statutory minimum requirements for content for minutes, 5 days gives minute-takers ample opportunity to post a draft of basic details on-line, or in a publicly visible location. In this digital world, 10 days is a veritable eternity to wait for the public posting of local government actions having an impact on citizens' lives.

For those who might argue that smaller communities don't have the resources to draft and post minutes within 5 days, we would counter that there are plenty of eager high school/college students out there that would relish the opportunity to assist their town in such an endeavor. It would provide an outlet for civic engagement as well as resume builder for the young participants.

\* The penalty of \$500. We would argue that the prospect of a \$500 fine would not pose much of a deterrent to anyone who "knowingly and

intentionally" violates the law. We also believe seven days is adequate for a public official to respond to allegations of an Open Meeting Law violation.

\* The apparent exclusion of local subcommittees and ad hoc panels from the minutes-posting obligations set forth in S.114. We do not believe that is wise or acceptable.

On the positive side, I have witnessed the benefits of the new Open Meeting Law provisions allowing board members to participate at meetings by speaker phone. This, I believe, was an example of how the Open Meeting Law could be improved for the common good.

Perhaps the state could provide a template for town officials to use in crafting minutes for on-line posting.

Thank you for this opportunity,

John Flowers